FAMILY TRANSITION AT MARRIAGE

Marriage transfers the boy into the adult farm-owning man, the farm father into the old man; it brings the same changes for the women. Such changes are, of course, not abrupt; the groups which are substantially of the same age do not undergo disruption with the movement of one of their number from status of boy to that of man. But, on the other hand, there are general patterns of behavior which mark off these groupings in an informal manner, and which betray their origin in a social valuation of age differences.

The behavior of the different age groups is of the most intimate everyday kind, and consequently reflects those differentiations of status which are given formal and explicit recognition at marriage. Felt to be too natural a part of daily life to require explanation on the part of the farmers themselves, their behavior, nevertheless, is very easily remarked by the observer. In the ordinary countryman's house, for example, the man of the house and whatever older men may be present occupy chairs drawn up before the hearth. The hob by the fire belongs to the old couple by right. The younger people, the sons and daughters, sit behind them round the room on other chairs or on the window seats of the rectangular kitchen, which makes up the principal room of the usual small farmer's house. This arrangement shows itself best in the *cuaird* or visit, where the old men of the district drop in on neighbors and "friends" to sit around the hearth together passing the evenings of winter in conversation, singing, discussing the news, and telling the old stories of legend and folklore. At the *cuaird* younger men and women, if they attend, sit behind, usually leaving the center of the stage to the old men, and the children stand up behind in silent admiration. The younger men have their own pursuits, of course, though at present the divergence may be more marked than formerly. Lately, in Clare at least, they have taken to card playing on a gambling basis for stakes of small livestock in the country districts.

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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For the young people do not agree with their elders on the score of their own shortcomings. They do not express these attitudes. They have a good deal to say, on the other hand, among themselves from their own point of vantage. They express the reverse of the medal. The past is not so golden to them; and there are many among their elders whose idiosyncrasies can be swept aside with some such sweeping condemnation as 'old fool' and 'old blatherer'. Like the son I quoted in the last lecture, who listened patiently to his father, only to follow his own devices, they have their own valuations in which youth and strength outweigh age and ripe experience.

Yet within a system of values in which the old represent the nexus of kinship and bear honour within the community, the young people do not see the issue so clearly. There is as much respect as there is antagonism in their verbal assessment of the old people. In the non-verbal behaviour of daily conduct, deference is uppermost. This fact sobers their group's egocentricity. In their position there is a necessary balance between subordination and compensatory vauntings and distastes. If you remember Synge's *Playboy*, you remember how reality broke in upon the playboy when the community saw his father still very much alive.

So, within this framework the young men can recognize themselves as a distinct group—an age grade, to use technical language. They have their

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the interests of the community, before priest, schoolmaster, merchant, cattleman and government official. The younger men hang back, ready to be brought in when the elders want them, listening in and keeping their own counsel.

The relation extends in fact to very small matters indeed. The better cup of tea, the bigger piece of bread, the two eggs instead of one, the pipeful of tobacco, go to the older men. This last, tobacco, is no small matter where even now tobacco is still expensive enough to require careful husbanding. It is a custom in the country districts to pass the pipe round among one's intimates and guests, for testing, for praise, and to the accompaniment of formulae still often magical in nature. But the pipe does not go to the young man; he must content himself with an occasional 'fag'. When there is little, the young man can go without.

For illustration there is the anecdote that one Clare farmer tells: "During the time when tobacco was scarce [the war], an old man came into Sullivan's [shop] and asked for a half-quarter [cut of tobacco]. The Missus told him to go [get it] where he always bought it. He was very cast down. After he was out the door I said to her—she should give him some tobacco because a man who is used to it all his life would miss it greatly if he can't get it. Let the young bucks go, says I, they don't want it. But an old fellow wants it badly. She looked at me and says, Frank, are you serious? I am, faith, says

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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I; call back the old man. He was just a few paces down the road. She did, and his face lighted up and he couldn't thank her enough."

Informal as these differences are, they are nevertheless powerful agents in the regulation of conduct among small farmers. Without them the flavour of rural life is lost. Without them, too, one can gain no understanding of the continual round of informal activities of social intercourse which fill the non-working lives of the countrymen. For the country-people have their entertainments, like their more sophisticated urban contemporaries. The student of society cannot afford to dismiss them as inconsequential. They are often important controls of human activity.

When my colleagues and I first made our way into the rural communities we were to come to know best, we were plunged into a mass of observations which seemed to have no interpretation. Night after night, their day's work done, our new acquaintances, at least the males among them, walked out upon the roads to this house and that in search of recreation and companionship. Mention of dances, gambles, sings, *ceilidhthe*, filled our ears, belying the impression of a gray monotony of rural life too easily gathered by town-bred minds. Some of these sportive gatherings were age-old customs like the bonfires of St. John's Eve; others celebrated crucial events, such as wakes, christenings, weddings. But many others were less occa-

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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the small farmers as being a 'cut' below themselves; consequently, his untidiness is a byword among them. One version of the story goes, in synopsis, as follows:

"Many families moved into a herdsman's place, but they were all chased out of it. Finally, one family moved in, cleaned up the house, and a 'paving path' round it. A little old woman visits the wife, borrows a cooking-pot, and is similarly well treated. In gratitude she explains that the woman of the house and her husband will always prosper and never be molested, because they alone of all the families had cleaned up the place where 'they' walk."

In this way the values of daily life are projected into and reinforced by the supernatural world. The same state of affairs holds good even in the convention of social intercourse. The vocabulary of the countryman is full of homely pieties. On entering a house the proper greeting is "God bless all here". On coming upon another at work, one says, "God bless the work". Similarly, "God spare you the health" is 'put on' anyone who 'coors' with you. Any praise of person, child, or animal is accompanied with a "God bless it"; any mention of unpleasantness or danger is followed with some such homily as "God bless the mark", and so on. If one omits such pieties, one is sure to rouse resentment in the listeners. For one must remember that emotion supports these conventions. But the

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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152 resentment springs from other causes, too. These
576 formulae are known to the folklorist as 'protective
626 formulae'. He means by that that they have reference to the lesser faith as well as to the greater that the countryman holds.

751 If you ask the countryman why he uses such terms, he will give you several answers. First, "You
152 have right to do it, because you owe it to God",
576 and then, second, "It will bring good luck, it will
626 keep 'them' away". For the countryman, both answers are true. The phrases are both acts of pious invocation and protective devices warding off evil. Their omission is really dangerous. It puts the person or thing so neglected in jeopardy; the negligent speaker is open to suspicion of an evil intent. Thus there are many stories which attribute disease, disaster and death to such omissions. In this way again, persons and things of value to the countryman are brought into the scope of his beliefs and attitudes. The forces which affect them are brought into a shape in which he can understand them and in which he can cope with them.

776 Perhaps the most interesting part of this process is to be found in the way in which the goods by which the countryman lives are brought into his belief. The good people affect the household and all its goods. They 'take' those things which one values, round which one's interest and sentiments, as a member of the farm-working family, are centred. One Galway woman phrased this idea to

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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sea monsters, with animals both wild and tame, with red hair, physical deformities and so on, nor the wealth of folk-lore and folk tales which the Irish Folklore Commission is rescuing from every barony in the country. A beginning has been made in the immense task of sorting out, mapping and interpreting these beliefs. One would like to know the distribution of many persistent customs and practices, for this is the best guide to their origin and significance. How far south, for instance, does the typical Ulster greeting on the road extend—that slow silent half-negative sideways nod of the head? Some day it may be possible, as I wrote five years ago, "to interpret the subtle differences between one region and another which make up the attractive variety of rural Ireland and provide sources of friendly rivalry and rich humour."[1]

824

A Fairy Thorn

[1] *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, July 1935.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

Climate

821 Whether or not the steamer calls at Inis Beag, especially during the winter months when severe storms are frequent, is of considerable psychological significance. The importance of weather conditions as they impinge, both directly and [182] indirectly, on this tiny island far out in the ocean cannot be overemphasized. Most [521] activities, and not only farming and fishing, are more or less affected by the climate, and the past, present, and future states of the weather figure prominently [676] in conversations among the folk. It is customary for individuals when meeting to talk first of the weather before turning to other matters, and some of the common greetings pertain to immediate conditions: "It is raining.", "It is windy.", or "It is a beautiful day." These are usually the phrases first mastered by non-Gaelic speakers who spend time in Inis Beag, along with the most used greeting—"God bless you." and its reply, "God and Mary bless you."

132 The year around climate of Inis Beag might be labeled cool, humid, rainy, [127] and windy, at least by one living in the Great Lakes region of the United States. A perusal of lighthouse records for the decade 1951 to 1960 revealed a mean temperature of 42 degrees (all figures Fahrenheit) for the winter months, December to March, and 59 degrees for the summer ones, June to September. During that decade, the lowest and highest temperatures recorded in Inis Beag, both during 1955, were 28 and 80 degrees respectively. January was the coldest month, with a mean temperature of 39 degrees, and July was the warmest, with 61 degrees. The island is located in a climatic zone in which the average rainfall is 40 to 50 inches per year; the average number of rain days per year is 225, and the average June sun hours per day is five and a half.

> Westerly winds predominate in Ireland, though naturally a climate experiencing the passage of so many depressions has winds from every quarter at some time during the year ... Winds of gale force are most frequent in the northwest, where they average 40 per year ... Most of the gales are from a westerly direction: they are so severe a menace to shipping that many inhabitants of [137] islands and remote coastal districts ... profit from periodic salvage hauls ... The absence of trees on the exposed western coasts of Ireland is usually regarded as a direct result of the exposure to westerly winds ... (Freeman 1960:50–51).

Snow usually falls several times during the winter, but it melts within hours as the temperature seldom fails to climb above freezing on any day. During the months from June to August, the sea and air are often warm enough to encourage 821 "comfortable" swimming by tourists, usually off the strand. The islanders consider May the ideal month so far as climate is concerned, for the weather tends to be cool, dry, and windy; flowers grow in profusion and birds return in great numbers. March weather, which is much colder but also dry and windy, is called "hard."

All of the adults of Inis Beag are amateur weather forecasters; however, [805] several old men are considered to be specialists in the art. Some households possess [207] barometers, and forecasts on the radio are listened to attentively by those who own sets. But, in the main, the folk prefer to make their own prognostications based on traditional signs, most of which are sound meteorologically and the outgrowth of

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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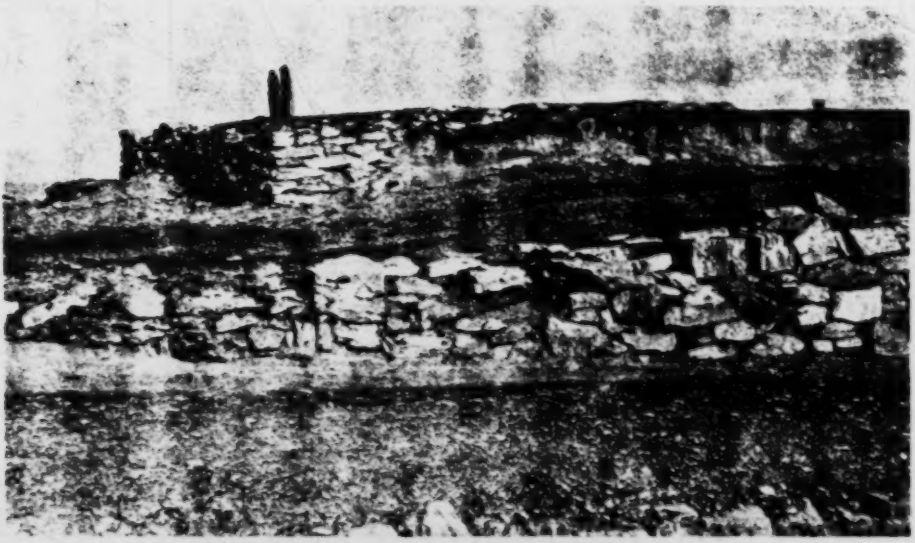

Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pookah

776 [771] black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37–38).

754 178 Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after 754 midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies, 753 she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When 755 it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human 855 offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch, she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency.

754 [624] [576] Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause

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misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.

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Women tend to drink very little at parties, in part because of the embarrassment caused them by visiting the outside toilet with men looking on.

The party commences with several sets danced in quick succession. There is room for only one dance group initially because of the small size of the kitchen and the large number of guests filling the house. It is difficult to move about the two rooms with the press of bodies, and the crowd within is matched by the cluster of men around the front door awaiting their turn to dance. Unmarried women tend to sit and stand on one side of the kitchen and men on the other, while married people congregate in the other room. Children in their best dress sit quietly together and watch the festivities tirelessly until the guests depart. Crowding at the party necessitates that men and women will be pressed together both as dancers and viewers, and that persons will sit on one anothers' laps, including women on the laps of men occasionally. The islanders strain to display indifference, as they do in watching a full-bodied woman step dance, at least until the intake of alcohol causes a few to betray their emotions.

Usually two or even three accordionists (and the visiting anthropologist with his phonograph) are invited to attend, and they spell one another. After an hour or so of dancing, singers and step dancers perform between the sets while stout is poured; they may be called out by the urging of the guests, or by the host or one of his choosing who acts as a master of ceremonies and directs all of the activities of the party. Stout may be distributed during the sets, but most hosts prefer that it be done during pauses, so that less is spilled by the dancing and milling crowd. The pourer with his bucket follows the movement of the mugs and glasses as they are passed about, and each man on having his container filled drains it quickly and surrenders it to another nearby. Most of the young men visit the pubs before the party and may do so again once or twice before the pubs close.

Midway during the night, the table of "the room" is set, and refreshments are served to all of the guests in shifts. First the women are served, then the children, followed by the young men who do not drink stout, and finally the other men. Both in viewing the proceedings from benches and in eating, the children are separated as to sex. The menu resembles that of the usual Inis Beag meal and includes tea, bread spread with butter and jam, cakes, and sometimes hard candy. Between the many sittings, the dishes and utensils are washed in a bucket and the table reset. Dancing continues in the kitchen during this period, and after everyone is served the table is moved to a corner and a second set is formed. The remainder of the night is spent in dancing, but the pauses which punctuate the sets become longer and the songs and step dances by guests more frequent as dawn approaches.

My wife and I sponsored a Christmas party in 1959 in the home of an islander and invited the entire population of Inis Beag. Two hours after midnight, when I was absent briefly escorting an old man to his cottage, a fight broke out between two family factions which sent all of the guests scurrying home. The following day, everyone whom we met commiserated with us "for the shame of it," and we were told of many other parties in the past which had ended in the same manner, so that we would not think our affair a failure. In recent years, "rowdyism" on the part of youths who have "taken too much" has increased at

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parties, so that many islanders will not give them for fear of possible damage to houses and outbuildings. The reason why one man is assigned to the barrel of stout and a "firm" master of ceremonies is favored is to curb drunkenness and factional fighting. Small parties are coming to replace the large ones of the past, with invitations tendered secretly and at the last moment to avoid attracting "hooligans." The format, however, has remained the same.

Pubs

Both pubs in Inis Beag do a thriving business. There are some folk who purchase all of their provisions, drinks, and tobacco in only one of the pubs, others who buy most of them in one but occasionally do business in the second, and still others who scrupulously balance their buying between the two. The first group is composed of near kin of the publicans, and the second of those who are economically beholden to the king and utilize his pub mostly, or who dislike him and give the lion's share of their business to the other. This pattern is broken only when one of the pubs is out of a commodity which the other has in stock, one of them is closed for whatever reason, a "big night" is taking place at one of them, or a dispute interferes. During the day, provisions are purchased in the shop—by children, women, and sometimes men; the women and children make their visits as brief as possible, but the men are likely to stay for at least one "pint" of stout and a "smoke." Other visitors in the daytime are chronic drinkers, men who are working nearby and use the pub for a break, and men reciprocating for economic services rendered. The pub is the province of the adult males at night, and the only women who enter are the teachers, visiting emigrants, and tourists. Seldom is step dancing done unless outsiders are present, and when women are in the audience they will be called out to form a set or to dance solo or be paired with an islander. Some nights only two or three of the folk will put in an appearance at the pub, but on other nights as many as 20 persons will crowd into the narrow room, while others in the hallway and outside wait to take their turn inside. Another half-dozen men may sit in the snug drinking and talking together privately.

Men come to the pub after dark usually in groups of two, three, or four. Reciprocity dictates the drinking procedure, with each man in a group taking his turn at "standing a round" for as long as the evening lasts. Men who do not like to drink much or have little money will come to the pub singly or with another in like circumstances, so that they will not become victims of the custom of reciprocation. My first experience with this custom—in 1958 in a neighboring island—almost ended in tragedy for me, as I was with six men who insisted on drinking "glasses" of whiskey, only my deep commitment to research and a heavy meal a short time before prevented a "third round knockout." The first hour after the men arrive in the pub is a quiet one, as they sit in silence or whisper to one another while drinking pints in rapid succession. As their shyness gradually is overcome by alcohol, they become more talkative and speak in louder tones to a wider circle of their fellows. At least two hours must pass before individuals have "courage" enough to tell stories to all assembled or to sing. The best singers will be

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The best singers will be called out with shouts of encouragement from the others, and some men need as many as five minutes of urging before they will perform. In the case of the man who is particularly reticent about singing, those sitting on either side of him will grasp his hands with one of theirs and swing his arms backward and forward until he commences to sing in the suggested rhythm of the arm movements. Sometimes this continues throughout the song, and later in the evening it is done with other singers as the sense of male "camaraderie" grows apace.

Seldom does fighting break out in the pub, for the publican will not serve drinks to those whom he feels have taken too much, and he will order everyone out if there is a threat of violence. Visiting women invariably are treated politely no matter how boisterous the men become. On a nearby island, my wife and I saw a Yank brutally beaten and thrown out of a pub by several men when he spoke "disrespectfully" in Gaelic before us and another visiting women. An elderly widower of Inis Beag was much criticized when after dancing with my wife in a pub he brushed his check against hers briefly in his exuberance; she thought nothing of it, but many of the folk apologized to her for his action, and our relationship with the man thereafter was strained. Visitors must be careful about how they participate in the drinking pattern of the pub. If they drink by themselves or only with outsiders and never buy rounds for the islanders present, they are despised secretly; but if they stand rounds often with the obvious end in view of earning acceptance, they are considered "fools." The several folk who will take advantage of a stranger who is generous with rounds in the pub are subjected to severe censure. Each year, my wife and I donate a barrel of stout to a pub on St. Partick's Day to be drunk by islanders who come that night—to commemorate the shipwreck and rescue (whose anniversary is nine days before); a verse of my ballad refers to certain folk who will not accept drinks unless they can reciprocate—"People will say the free stout brought me in."

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own words and actions in the presence of others so that the fires of factionalism are not ignited. Equally feared are informers of the curate and relatives or close friends of persons in an audience who might be offended by a heedless remark brought to their attention by the listeners.

It is sometimes heard in Ireland, from those aware of, and willing to admit, the fact, that the inability of most Irish to "share themselves" with one another, even husbands and wives, is a heritage of the fear of gossip—a fear that one's intimate revelations will become common knowledge and lead to censure and "loss of face." A more likely explanation, according to those of Freudian bent, is the Oedipus configuration, which numbers among its many effects the following: the prevalence of romantic attachments and the rarity of conjugal love; the lack of sexual foreplay, marked by little or no concern with the female breast; the brevity of the coital act and the frequent spurning of the woman following it; the need to degrade the woman in the sexual encounter and the belief that the "good" woman does not like sex, and, conversely, that the sexually disposed woman is by virtue of the fact "bad." All of these widely reported phenomena bespeak the overwhelming influence of the mother image.

Ridicule and opprobrium, as well as satire in song and tale, are effective control mechanisms in light of the emphasis placed by Inis Beag folk on saving face. Most islanders could not believe that I was author of the ballad referred to in footnote 5 because several stanzas attack my character; they find it difficult to conceive of anyone publicly proclaiming their own faults, under any circumstances. Opinions, once formed, are clung to tenaciously, even in light of obviating circumstances, since to alter them would be an admittance that they were ill advised in the first instance. The folk pride themselves on being able to judge a stranger's character immediately on meeting him, and this initial impression is rarely modified no matter how long their interaction continues. A seldom revealed tradition of satirical balladry exists in Inis Beag, but its employment is infrequent and then calculated according to singer and audience so as not to offend directly. Apprehensiveness and anxiety about real and imagined ego assaults by others are dominant personality traits of the islanders.